

Memories of A. E. Housman

BY LAURENCE HOUSMAN

OF the early years of an eldest brother, six years my senior, I know little except on hearsay from himself and others. In a brief autobiographical note, which he supplied to a French translator of some of his poems, he gave the following account of himself:

I was born in Worcester-shire, not Shropshire, where I have never spent much time. My father and mother were respectively Lancashire and Cornish. I had a sentimental feeling for Shropshire because its hills were our western horizon. My topographical details—Hughley, Abdon-under-Clee, etc., are sometimes quite wrong: but I know Ludlow and Wenlock.

I took an interest in astronomy almost as early as I can remember: the cause, I think, was a little book we had in the house.

I was brought up in the Church of England and in the High Church party, which is much the best religion I have ever come across. But Lemprière's "Classical Dictionary," read when I was eight, made me prefer paganism to Christianity; I abandoned Christianity at thirteen, and became an atheist at twenty-one.

I never had any scientific education. I wrote verse at eight or earlier, but very little until I was thirty-five.

That last statement needs qualification. He had a great facility for verse-writing, and not only wrote poems of a serious character but was prolific in *vers d'occasion*. In early years his compositions so much exceeded his own use for them, that he sometimes palmed them off on others, and my first sonnet, written when I was about six and before I knew what constituted a sonnet, was dragged out of me, or squeezed into me, by a process of hypnotic suggestion which left me entirely convinced at the time that the poem was mine, though I know better now.

Under his leadership, in a family of seven, we all wrote poems, even the unpoetic ones: lyrics, ballads, sonnets, narrative poems, nonsense-rhymes, and compositions to which each contributed a verse (not always in the same metre) occupied almost as much of our playtime as the more active games of childhood, in which also, as often as not, he led and we followed.



A. E. HOUSMAN

Drawing by Rothenstein, from "Twenty-four Portraits."

His early education was first under a governess, then at a small dame-school, where a slipper was the regular instrument used for corporal punishment; at the age of eleven he was elected to a Foundation Scholarship at Bromsgrove School, where he remained to the end of his school-days.

Having gained an open scholarship at St. John's College, Oxford, in 1877, he went up in the autumn of that year. There was no particular reason, except the need for a good scholarship, why that college should have been chosen. Unfortunately there were parental reasons against two others which might have suited him better. His father would not allow him to try for a Balliol Scholarship from disapproval of the theological views of Dr. Jowett, the Master; Cambridge was ruled out unless he could obtain a scholarship at the college (St. John's) where uncles and grandparents had graduated, and where one had become Dean.

It is probable that Cambridge, with its Classical Tripos, would have opened for him a better course of study than Ox-

ford, where after gaining a First in "Moderations" in 1879, he failed in "Greats" two years later—so bringing his university career to a catastrophic end, which, for the time at any rate, destroyed all chance of a scholastic appointment at Oxford or Cambridge, and compelled him to accept as an alternative the uncongenial work of a civil servant in H. M. Patent Office, where he remained for ten years.

An explanation of his failure in "Greats" has recently been given by one of his friends and contemporaries at Oxford. Finding himself unable to deal to his full, honest satisfaction with certain of the set papers, he gave no answers at all, thus, as he himself declared, leaving the examiners no alternative to the course they took. But to the best of my recollection, for home consumption (where the disappointment was naturally very great) he gave no explanation at all.

On leaving Oxford he remained a member of the University, and having in a subsequent year passed the necessary examination, took his B.A. and his M.A. together in 1892, when, on the strength of the reputation which he had built up for himself, by his classical contributions to the learned journals, he was appointed Professor of Latin at University College, London.

In the autobiographical note from which I have already quoted, "Oxford" wrote Alfred, "had not much effect upon me, except that I there met my greatest friend." A statement which can hardly be as true as he would have liked it to be; since this, at any rate, can be said for certain—he came back from Oxford a changed character. It was probably the blow of his failure which caused him

Next  Week

THE ANATOMY OF FRUSTRATION

By H. G. WELLS

Reviewed by Elmer Davis

MOSCOW SKIES

By MAURICE HINDUS

Reviewed by Kathleen Barnes

from that time on to withdraw so completely into himself, and he became a silent and impenetrable recluse in the midst of his own family, during the year which elapsed before he left home to take up his Civil Service appointment in London. Up to the beginning of his university career he had been our social and intellectual leader, the inventor of our games, the composer and producer of our plays (impromptus devised only on the day of their performance), the editor and chief contributor to our *Family Magazine*, and the instigator of all our attempts in prose and poetry. When he came back, and for a good many years afterwards, we ceased to know him—mainly, if not entirely, because he was determined not to be known. If sympathy was what he feared to receive on his return from Oxford, he took the best means to deprive himself of it; and only very occasionally at first, and then gradually as the years went on, did he allow a breaking-down of the barrier.

But in those first years while up at Oxford, his correspondence with members of the family was lively and amusing; and during vacation there was no diminution of his social affability. It must have been during those intervals of college life that he delighted us with some of his best pieces of nonsense-verse. Our evening diversions, almost as long as I can remember, had often been of a semi-literary character. One of these was the writing of short poems, containing a collection of nouns, each member of the company supplying one. Here is a sample of the sort of thing which Alfred was able to turn out in the course of fifteen or twenty minutes. The nouns were: hat, novel, banker, cucumber, yacht, and abridgment. Obviously the last was the crux; and this is how Alfred tackled it:

At the door of my own little hovel,
Reading a novel I sat;
And as I was reading the novel
A gnat flew away with my hat.
As fast as a fraudulent banker
Away with my hat it fled,
And calmly came to an anchor
In the midst of the cucumber-bed.

I went and purchased a yacht,
And traversed the garden-tank,
And I gave it that insect hot
When I got to the other bank;
Of its life I made an abridgment
By squeezing it somewhat flat,
And I cannot think what that midge
meant
By flying away with my hat.

One Christmas (1879, I think), we attempted something more ambitious, which produced a memorable result. Each wrote a story, and on Christmas Eve, or thereabouts, the stories were read out to the assembled family. Alfred's contribution was a domestic sketch in verse and prose entitled "A Morning with the Royal Family," the opening sentence of which ran: "Pigs on the front lawn!"

cried the King, 'Lend me a cannon, somebody!' Nobody lent him a cannon, so seizing a tea-spoon from the breakfast-table he rushed from the apartment." The whole story—the only complete work of fiction, I think, which he ever produced—was published a year or two later, without his permission, in the school magazine, of which at that time another brother was editor: and it has remained ever since a prized but rather private family possession, republication having been strictly forbidden by the author.

While at University College, Alfred contributed occasional nonsense-rhymes to the *College Magazine*, three of which (though not his best) he allowed to be privately reprinted in 1935. He also gave, about once a year, a written paper on one of the British poets, before the College Literary Society; his chosen poets were: Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, Burns, Campbell, Erasmus Darwin, Swinburne, and "The Spasmodic School." He was only quite kind to two of them—Matthew Arnold, and Campbell; all the others were subjected to varying degrees of satirical criticism—so severe, in the case of Burns, that a Scottish professor, rising in wrath, declared he would never forgive the lecturer for what he had said

of him. It would be unkind on my part to excite the interest of my readers any further in material which I am under orders to destroy. These papers have to share the fate of a very much better one—the Inaugural Lecture which my brother gave on his appointment, in 1911, to the Kennedy Professorship of Latin at Cambridge University, and which he would not allow to be published because of his inability to retrace his authority for a statement which he had made concerning a Shelley MS; as to which later investigation has gone rather against him.

In the autobiographical note from which I have already quoted, Alfred writes of his years in London as follows:

While I was at the Patent Office I read a great deal of Greek and Latin at the British Museum of an evening. While at University College, which is not residential, I lived alone in lodgings in the environs of London.

"A Shropshire Lad" was written in Byron Cottage, 17 North Road, Highgate, where I lived from 1886 to 1905.

"A Shropshire Lad" was offered to Macmillan, and declined by them on the advice, I have been told, of Mr. John Morley, who was their reader. Then a friend introduced me to Kegan Paul; but the book was published at my own expense.

(Continued on page 15)

Divine Discontent

By FRANCES TAYLOR PATTERSON

IS it enough that the trees should hold
In their leafy towers the lightfoot wind?
Is it enough that time is told
By a silver lake with a face of glass
Where the sun marks time with shadow hands?
Four o'clock and four o'clock.
The dandelions, no longer gold,
Are blowing away in a starry fluff.
The lizard lies on the ancient stone.
The sun is warm on the ancient air.
The world is old; the world is fair.
The world is fair; the world is old.

Chorus of locusts; hum of bees.
The bees and the locusts have their way.
The bees leave honey, the locusts shells.
But both have flown and both have been,
And being is enough.

The trees have roots; the roots have rain.
But what are roots to such as I
Who love not the roots but the light tree tops,
Who long for the back, not the face of the sky,
The unassailed and ineffable high?

Life is a whimsy that runs away
Through the walls of the world and will not stay.
The moving river wears the rock.
Time is a vapor, a vanishing stuff;
Steam of the sun that soon must pass.
The past is a key that fits no lock.
Everything goes and nothing stops.
And nothing is enough.

Flood, Drought, and Waste

RICH LAND POOR LAND. By Stuart Chase. New York: Whittlesey House. 1936. \$2.50.

Reviewed by H. S. PERSON

THE works of Stuart Chase belong essentially to the field of economics, but they are not treatises on economics as an abstract science. They are concerned with the economic significance of habits, customs, and institutions in the field where economics, politics, government, and business overlap, as is instanced by his earliest work, "The Tragedy of Waste," and one of the most recent, "The Economy of Abundance." "Rich Land Poor Land" differs considerably from the others in that it interprets for the layman the social significance of certain habits and institutions in the light of pertinent physical sciences—geology, hydrology, agronomy, and especially ecology. The main theme is the waste of physical resources and the disaster threatened thereby to the economic and cultural life of the United States.

Some seventy years ago George P. Marsh (philologist, diplomatist, and politician, but an omnivorous reader in many languages whose mind seemed to retain every item of information that ever came to him) wrote a work on the earth as modified by human action. He raised the question whether the United States would be a permanent country. He had noticed that it presented a combination of climatic, topographic, soil, and agricultural factors similar to that presented by other countries, once opulent and magnificent, but now stripped of their fertile soils and buried in the dust of destructive exploitation of resources. "Nature," he said, "has provided against the absolute de-

struction of her elementary matter, . . . but she has left it within the power of man irreparably to derange the combination of inorganic matter and organic life, which through the night of æons she had been proportioning and balancing to prepare the earth for his habitation. . . ."

To his question and its implication no attention was given. Was not the United States a vast area of unlimited resources? Appropriation and exploitation proceeded with increasing intensity. Agricultural and forestry practices developed in accordance with immediate individual interests and without thought of collective and ultimate individual interests. The emergence of a conservation movement under the influence of Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot did not affect the trend.

Within the past three or four years the question has again come to the fore, and this time the people of the United States have had to give attention. They could not ignore the destruction of basic resources by water and wind erosion caused by the practices of men; the dramatic and tragic dust storms of 1934 and 1936. The Soil Conservation Service and the Forestry Service of the Federal Government were strengthened; the Mississippi Valley Committee, the National Resources Committee, and the Great Plains Drought Area Committee were appointed to study and report on the conservation of soils, waters, and minerals, and in general on adjustment to nature's basic conditions. The files of years of observation and experiment were brought out and analyzed. Such basic sciences as geology and hydrology were brought to focus on the problem.

In "Rich Land Poor Land" the author has taken these data and reports and made a fascinating story of waste in all the basic resources of the United States, and what we—all of us as citizens, not merely farmers, foresters, and miners—can and should do about the matter. It is written in the characteristic Chase style—simple, dramatic, with a flow that carries the reader along in the manner of one of the floods which it discusses. The format reinforces the author's treatment. It is an innovation among books designed for adults. The end paper design, the drawings, and the schematic maps by Henry Billings, and also the photographic illustrations, attract and hold attention and add to the notably clear exposition of the author.

The test of merit, however, is not style or format, but content, and especially the accuracy of scientific references. This is a severe test in a work of interpretation. Scientists themselves make few generalizations without a sequence of ifs and buts. On many points scientists are not in agreement among themselves. However, he who writes for laymen must present definite generalizations and do so simply and without confusing qualifications. He must not make an error in detail that would seriously mislead. Especially his composite picture must bring a correct understanding of the problem, and point to a rational solution. "Rich Land Poor Land" meets these tests.

H. S. Person is Consulting Economist of the Rural Electrification Administration at Washington.

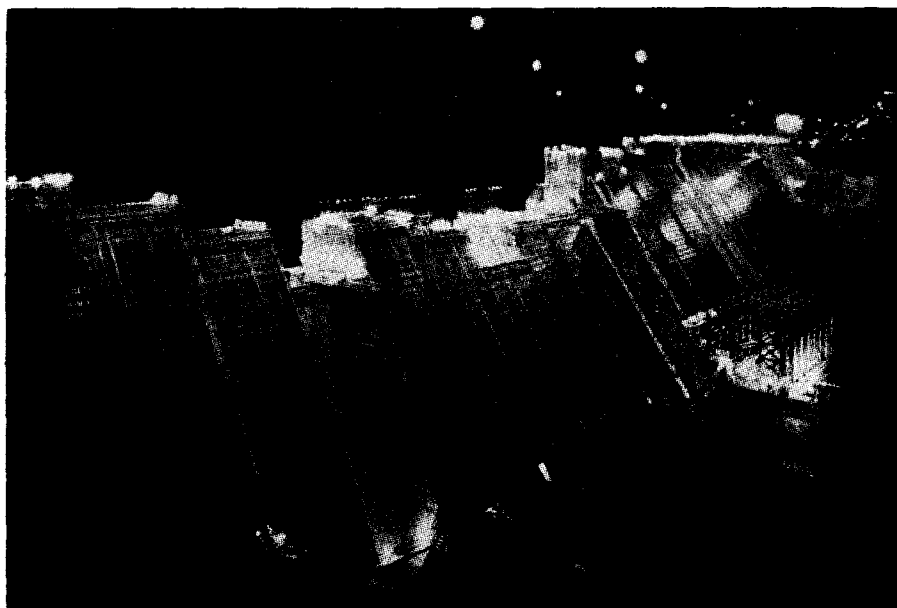
The Fighting Moros of the Philippines

SWISH OF THE KRIS. By Vic Hurley. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1936. \$3.

Reviewed by VICTOR HEISER, M.D.

THIS new volume by the author of "Southeast of Zamboanga" is primarily a history of the Moro fighting, a collection of facts garnered over seven years. It is too technical for the general reader, not technical enough for the military man. Even the detailed accounts of the engagements which gained General Pershing his promotion from captain to brigadier-general and the description of General Wood's great victory at Bagsak are not so interesting as they should be. A bare recital of events lacks that interpretation which makes for drama. The author has found the story dramatic (as it is) but is unable to convey this feeling.

Mr. Hurley makes heroes of the Moros, as though being fierce and warlike, able to forge ahead with lead-filled bodies, were prime virtues. He ignores the fact that any neighboring country had to attempt some control or else be subject to constant piratical raids of the most unpleasant sort. He stresses the bravery, ad-



NORRIS DAM AT NIGHT

Photo by Charles Krutch, from "Rich Land Poor Land."